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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

298th meeting

Wednesday, 29 November 2006, 10.50 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today, the Committee is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and great pleasure to warmly welcome Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Mr. Jorge Voto-Bernales, President of the Security Council; Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Permanent Representative of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations and Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine; and Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I also wish convey the Committee's great appreciation to the representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations and all those who so readily accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting. In taking part in this commemorative ceremony, we wish to solemnly express here our full, complete solidarity with the just cause of the Palestinian people and pay glowing homage to all those who have dedicated their lives to bringing about peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

I would like now to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

We have gathered here today, following a tradition that goes back to 1977, to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We are greatly honoured by the presence at this commemorative ceremony of many distinguished guests.

When, in 1977, the General Assembly decided to observe this Day of Solidarity, it was fully aware of the responsibility borne by the United Nations towards the Palestinian people and of the need to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. Today's observance of the International Day of Solidarity is a solemn occasion on which we reaffirm the ongoing commitment of the international community to achieve that goal.

The Palestinians have known almost 40 years of foreign occupation. Their daily suffering and humiliation stem from the fact that they do not have their own State. For a very long time, they have been denied the opportunity to exercise their inalienable rights as defined by the General Assembly, such as the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, the right to return to their homes and the right to recover their lands from which they have been

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uprooted. Above all, they have been denied the right to live a normal life, and to coexist peacefully with their Israeli neighbours.

Over the years, the occupation has been accompanied by an increasingly intense and disproportionate use of military force against the defenceless residents of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, a relentless drive to create new Israeli settlements, repeated acts of collective punishment and grave violations of international law.

It is frustrating to see that the question of Palestine and the plight of the Palestinian people have preoccupied the United Nations, indeed the entire international community, for decades. However, despite very many disappointments, there are still reasons to be hopeful. One of these is that we need to establish a sovereign, democratic, viable State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security and that this imperative has become virtually universally acknowledged and accepted.

The Road Map has charted the way to a final, peaceful settlement. What has been sorely missing, however, is a determined, firm political action to bring the political process to completion.

Since we last marked the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, many significant events have taken place. Israeli military operations have continued unabated. We have seen the use of heavy weaponry in densely populated areas, which has led to numerous civilian casualties and the destruction of much infrastructure.

The Gaza Strip has been especially hard hit. The hope that was generated by Israeli disengagement a year ago has quickly dissipated, which has only underscored the failure of unilateral Israeli measures. The construction of new settlements and the building of the wall continue and intensify, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. The restrictions placed on the movement of Palestinians continue to stifle a Palestinian economy that is already significantly depressed.

Yet, on the positive side, I would mention the Palestinian parliamentary elections, which were a major success, despite the very difficult conditions of occupation under which they were conducted. For the first time, the major political Palestinian forces all took part in the elections, laying the groundwork for a future democratic State of Palestine with modern democratic institutions. Despite political rivalries inherent to any national electoral competition, the political process experienced by the Palestinians provided dazzling proof of the maturity of Palestinian society. The ongoing negotiations on a national unity government are an important step in resolving the current political and socio-economic crisis and, hopefully, in facilitating the resumption of the long-stalled peace process.

But blood continues to be spilled in the Middle East. International efforts aimed at encouraging dialogue and negotiations continue. In this respect, the recent peace initiative launched by some countries of Europe may be promising. We also note the emergence of a consensus on the need to convene an international conference on the Middle East, which will take as its main model the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference on the Middle East.

Our celebration of the International Day of Solidarity provides us with the opportunity to reiterate our resolve to advance the cause of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This resolve manifests itself in the continuing efforts of the Quartet and of the entire international community: Governments, the United Nations family and intergovernmental and civil society organizations. On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, allow me to reiterate the Committee's long-standing determination to work towards the achievement of this goal in perfect cooperation with Member States and all civil society actors.

I should like to take the opportunity afforded by this solemn ceremony to express our Committee's profound gratitude to His Excellency Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to whom we pay a very special tribute. Throughout his tenure, Mr. Annan has demonstrated his perseverance, energy and exceptional wisdom as he has sought a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict. In an area that has been so long dominated by excessive passion and by discourse that has very often been destructive, his voice has been one of reason, measure and balance, as he has urged the parties to renounce violence and embark on the road of dialogue, which is the only road that can lead to peace.

I should also like to pay well-deserved tribute to Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, President of the General Assembly, for her wise leadership of the work of the General Assembly,

particularly during the latest resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the Assembly; and to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Voto-Bernales, President of the Security Council, and through him, to all the members of the Council that he represents here. I express to him our deep thanks for the significant discussions that the Security Council held this month, November 2006, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank all participants for having come together at this commemorative meeting and to have shown their will to look for a solution to what is undoubtedly one of the most complex, difficult and frustrating problems that the United Nations faces: the question of Palestine. I also especially thank the other members of the diplomatic corps who have joined us here as well as the heads of State or Government of Member States who have sent messages of support and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

It is also a great pleasure for me to welcome here the representatives of the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States. I thank them for their ongoing support and for their active participation in the work of our Committee, particularly on this, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

In stressing the permanent responsibility of the United Nations to resolve the question of Palestine, I would like to acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude the dedication, effectiveness and perseverance of the staff of United Nations agencies, bodies, funds and programmes, who work on the ground together with their colleagues from civil society organizations in difficult and often dangerous conditions. The daily lives of the Palestinians of the occupied territory would be even more difficult and hopeless without their support.

In conclusion, I would like once again to call on all the representatives of Member States and of intergovernmental and civil society organizations gathered here for this solemn occasion, to redouble their efforts to help the Palestinian people and to make progress in achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I now have the honour of giving the floor to the President of the General Assembly, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa.

Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain), President of the General Assembly (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to its Chairman. The Committee plays an important role that enables the international community to closely examine the situation of the Palestinian people and simultaneously to support efforts to attain a just peace between the parties concerned.

I am honoured to open this meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People who, this year, as in previous years, live in tragic circumstances that give rise to great losses on both sides. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to exacerbate the humanitarian, economic and security situation of the Palestinian people living in the occupied territories.

On this occasion, I would like to invite Israeli and Palestinian officials to redouble their efforts to bring about conditions conducive to dialogue. Such dialogue is crucial for reaching a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict, taking into account the interests of both peoples, despite the many impediments to the achievement of peace.

Of course, this situation requires the international community to fully support both parties and to follow up on the intensive past efforts, including those of the Quartet, which has proposed a Road Map calling for the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The Road Map offers the best and most beneficial solution yet.

In this extremely difficult and complex climate, we must foster the elements of agreement between the two sides to counteract the areas of disagreement that have deepened the crisis. Accordingly, the General Assembly has opposed the construction of the separation wall — a wall that not only serves to widen the gap between the Palestinian and Israeli communities but also helps to create psychological barriers that discourage dialogue and further complicate peace efforts.

We cannot delay action to improve the social and economic situation of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. We should not wait for anticipated solutions before we begin helping them to address the growing challenges confronting them in their daily lives.

Everyone is aware of the great difficulties being endured by the Palestinian people. All indicators show

that they are far from achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has noted that the dire humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza, has resulted in rising unemployment and poverty levels. According to the report of the Committee (A/61/35), the unemployment rate stands at 34 per cent in the occupied territories as a whole and at 44 per cent in the Gaza Strip, while the poverty rate stands at approximately 50 per cent overall and at approximately 70 per cent in the Gaza Strip. More than half of the Palestinian people are unable to meet their daily nutritional needs without assistance.

The report also notes the increased suffering endured by women as a result of the deteriorating security and economic situation. In addition, the World Health Organization has indicated that the acute shortage of water for drinking and other daily uses has had a negative impact on the health of the population, particularly children. There is also an inadequate supply of electricity, which is available for no more than six to eight hours a day. We must bear in mind that hospitals, other medical facilities and some medications require a constant energy supply.

That situation requires that we urgently seek a practical and serious solution. Here, I wish to commend the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations for their efforts to meet the vital and urgent needs of the Palestinian people. It is our moral duty to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to this conflict, which has continued for more than half a century.

We must not forget that the survival of millions of people around the world depends on the intervention and the resolutions of the United Nations. After all, the principal purpose of the Organization is to stand side by side in solidarity with the peoples of the world and to bring more peace, progress and prosperity to their lives.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for her important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to join the Committee in observing this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

I know I speak for all of us in expressing profound dismay that a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains so elusive.

In the past few days, with the announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza, we have had a glimmer of hope that the latest round of hostilities might give way to a period of calm. I call on both sides to adhere to that commitment and to avoid any actions that could jeopardize further progress. I also encourage them to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

Indeed, an end to violence is absolutely essential. The most recent military operations in the Gaza Strip resulted in a dramatic rise in civilian casualties and in the destruction of property and infrastructure. It remains crucial for Israel to exercise maximum restraint and to uphold its responsibility under international law to protect Palestinian civilians.

Israelis, too, live in insecurity. They have rightly demanded that the Palestinian Authority take credible action to prevent attacks against them and their territory. The constant rocket attacks by Palestinian militants against Israeli civilians are unacceptable and should be stopped at once.

The Palestinian Authority itself faces a debilitating political and financial crisis. Palestinian institutions, hospitals and schools are in an alarmingly precarious state, exacerbating the acute suffering already being endured by the Palestinian people. Indeed, the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza demands immediate attention, and I hope the donor community will continue to be generous, as it should be.

The bloodshed of the past several months has been all the more tragic because we know that clear majorities of both Palestinians and Israelis want a negotiated, two-State solution — one that would end the occupation that began in 1967, establish an independent State of Palestine and ensure security for Israel. I also believe that the leaders of each side — President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert — are genuinely committed to lifting their peoples out of decades of pain and uncertainty.

The parties themselves continue to bear the primary responsibility for finding their way out of their

predicament, by engaging in a viable political process that can lead to the peace that their peoples both yearn for and deserve. No one can make peace for them, impose peace on them — or want peace more than they do. At the same time, the international community has also played an important part in this conflict from its very beginnings and cannot escape its own responsibility to contribute to a solution.

The United Nations, of course, has always been in the forefront of that international role, deeply engaged in seeking peace and in efforts to relieve the suffering. We should not forget that this Day commemorates the General Assembly's first proposal for a two-State solution, in 1947. Today, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) remain the accepted guideposts for a just and lasting solution.

The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process continues to work very closely with the parties and with representatives of the international community in the region, and our humanitarian and development agencies continue to provide a lifeline to millions of Palestinians in need. I commend the work being done by the men and women of those agencies, who are carrying out their mandates under increasingly difficult and dangerous conditions.

On this International Day, let us commit ourselves to breathing new life into the peace process so that the goals of statehood for Palestinians and security for the State of Israel can be realized before this tragedy takes too many more lives.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his important statement. I should like to convey to the Secretary-General our profound gratitude for the tireless efforts he has been making to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

On a personal note, as he is preparing to leave his post as Secretary-General at the end of the year, I should like to reaffirm our profound gratitude to him for his unwavering support, during his 10 outstanding years in office, for the Committee and its activities aimed at achieving the objectives that have been assigned to us by the General Assembly: the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination without outside interference, the right to national independence and national sovereignty and the right to return to the homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted.

We wish the Secretary-General good health and every success for his remaining time in office and for his future endeavours.

It now gives me pleasure to give the floor to the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. Jorge Voto-Bernales.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru), President of the Security Council (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for having invited me to address this meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November 2006.

Since the late 1970s, we have gathered every year on this day to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is an important opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its commitment to the achievement of a lasting and sustainable peace in Palestine and the Middle East as a whole.

The Security Council continues to closely monitor the events in the region. Every month we listen to a briefing by the Secretary-General or his Personal Representative and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. When circumstances dictate — as was the case this year — the Council holds additional meetings devoted to this issue.

The Security Council is concerned about the deterioration of the situation on the ground as a result of the violence, which is affecting the civilian population and causing damage to infrastructure. That situation creates serious obstacles to progress and undermines efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region.

The Security Council urges Israel to act with restraint when confronting individual acts of violence directed against its territory. It is undeniable that every State has a right to self-defence. But it is important that that right be exercised with restraint, bearing in mind the potential consequences. By the same token, the Palestinian Authority must take steps to ensure the rule of law and to halt acts of violence and terror against civilians.

During the past year, the Security Council has continued to address the Middle East peace process on

the basis of its relevant resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and agreements entered into by all parties involved. The Security Council has also continued to support the work of the Quartet and the implementation of the Road Map, which is the cornerstone of a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Council calls on the parties concerned to comply with their obligations under the Road Map and with the requirements of the Quartet. The Council appreciates the regional efforts of Arab States in the quest for peace and stability in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I would like to reassure the Committee that the Security Council supports efforts aimed at achieving a settlement in accordance with the two-State solution. The current situation in the Middle East underscores the need to implement the Road Map without delay with a view to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, so that the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a sovereign, stable, democratic and viable State can be fulfilled.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the Security Council for his important statement.

I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): On this solemn occasion, it gives me great pleasure to read out the statement of President Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

> "In the name of the Palestinian people, I would like to extend to the Committee our warmest greetings on this day, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was designated by the General Assembly in December 1977, 30 years after the Assembly's resolution on the partition of Palestine. It was that resolution that marked the beginning of our people's ongoing tragedy. Since that time, the majority of the Palestinian people have been living as refugees in their own homeland, in neighbouring countries or in the diaspora. The rest of the Palestinian people are still living under a colonial occupation that is continuing to devour Palestinian land by means of the construction of the apartheid wall and dozens of colonial settlements and isolating East Jerusalem and surrounding it with fences.
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> "The General Assembly resolution designating 29 November each year as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is a forthright call for enabling them to attain their national right to self-determination and to establish an independent State of their own.
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> "I would like to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation for the efforts made by the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, aimed at achieving a just and permanent peace in the Middle East. I would also like to extend our thanks to our dear friend, His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to all the other members of the Committee for their efforts, their solidarity and their numerous initiatives, undertaken at various levels.
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> "In accordance with the Charter, the United Nations has endeavoured to enable peoples to exercise their right to self-determination and has entrusted the Security Council with the task of maintaining international peace and security. Those noble humanitarian principles protect every weak nation or State from those who are powerful and who seek domination. The United Nations is based on the rule that right is power, not vice versa. Accordingly, it is natural for a people like ours to continue to look to the United Nations for the attainment of its national rights. It is regrettable that the countless recommendations and resolutions of the United Nations have not been implemented. The obstacle has always been Israel's refusal to comply with resolutions of international legitimacy, encouraged by the veto power, which prevents the Security Council from adopting resolutions, thereby sending a message of double standards at the international level.

"This year, the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has greater significance than ever because of the progressive steps taken by our people to strengthen their political regime by adopting and exercizing a democratic system, as manifested in presidential, legislative and municipal elections, which — although they were held under very difficult circumstances — were declared by the international community to be transparent and fair. This was the first time in history that a people under occupation and deprived of its freedom had exercised its democratic electoral rights.

"In the light of the results of the legislative elections, I, acting within my constitutional power, have requested the majority party to form a new Government. I pointed out in my official statement at the inaugural session of the Legislative Council that the new Government must adhere to legitimacy and to the resolutions to which the Palestine Liberation Organization, as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, is committed. These Palestinian, Arab and international commitments and resolutions are prerequisites for the peace process and constitute the basis for a just peace. However, prior to the elections, the Israeli Government announced that it had 14 reservations regarding the Road Map, denied the existence of a Palestinian partner and chose what it called a unilateral solution.

"Compounding their suffering, a financial and economic embargo has been imposed against the Palestinian people, which has exacerbated poverty, driving it to unprecedented levels. In addition, daily acts of aggression — killings, house demolitions and the bulldozing of agricultural lands — continue to be carried out by the Israeli occupying forces. I would like to recall that more than 4,300 Palestinians — approximately one third of them children — have been killed since September 2000.

"This year has witnessed a large increase in the number of Palestinians killed. More than 510 people have been killed since June, the most recent killings taking place during the Beit Hanoun massacre of Wednesday, 8 November 2006, when 16 members of the same family were killed, including seven children, the youngest of whom was 6 months old.

"Justice and logic dictate that all parties must make every possible effort to fulfil their obligations and commitments. For our part, we have done and are still doing our utmost to bring all forms of violence against Israel to an end, and we have agreed to a unilateral ceasefire. We call upon Israel, which has not committed itself to a ceasefire, to end all of its aggressive military actions with a view to reaching a comprehensive and mutual ceasefire. That will enable us to create the right atmosphere and lay the necessary groundwork for the resumption of negotiations and the attainment of a just solution on the basis of signed agreements, the two-State solution and the Road Map, internationally endorsed pursuant to Security Council resolution 1515 (2003).

"As all members are aware, achieving that goal will require sincere efforts and honest intentions, as well as the strong will of the international community. The time has come for the convening of an international conference to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks and for the members of the Quartet to play the role of honest brokers and guarantors of the implementation of the agreements, on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy and the principle of land for peace, and to establish an appropriate mechanism to achieve that goal.

"For our part, despite the oppression, killings and destruction to which we have been subjected, our hands are still outstretched for peace, which the Palestinian people have embraced, with full awareness and conviction, as a strategic choice. The Israeli Government's plans, however, and the measures that it is taking to maintain control over large and significant parts of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, will undermine the two-State solution and force the entire region into further violence and chaos, whose consequences will not be limited to the Middle East region.

"On the basis of our conviction that the conflict should be resolved through negotiation and of our responsibility in that regard, we believe that, given the obstruction of the work of the Security Council, if Israel continues to reject

the idea of an international conference as well as any United Nations role, the adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution under the Uniting for Peace formula remains the right choice.

"The occupation of our land cannot continue forever, and the time has come to put an end to the bloodshed and to decades of hatred and hostilities. Today, I once again reiterate what I have said at previous occasions, that we want to establish our independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in our land occupied in the June 1967 war, and to find a just and agreed-upon solution to the issue of Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

"Our Palestinian State shall be a peaceful State living in peace and security with its neighbours, including Israel, and shall strengthen and fortify regional and international security.

"Finally, I would like to reiterate my profound gratitude to all who participated in commemorating this occasion, hoping that we shall celebrate it together next year with the establishment of our free and independent State of Palestine.

"Peace be upon you."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the ambassador and ask him kindly to convey our respectful greetings to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, as well as our sincere thanks for his very significant political message. On behalf of us all, I would like to express to the President of the Palestinian National Authority our feelings of solidarity with the Palestinian people in their aspirations and quest for a prosperous future in their own secure and viable State, recognized by the international community.

I should also like to assure President Abbas, and through him the Palestinian people as a whole, of the Committee's firm commitment to continue its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow our guests to leave the Chamber. On behalf of the Committee, once again, I should like to thank once more Her Excellency the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency the Secretary-General, His Excellency the President of the Security Council and His Excellency the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations for having graced us with their presence during this commemorative ceremony and for the important messages that they delivered.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I should now like to give the floor to Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations and Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: On this solemn occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am honoured to address this meeting in my capacity as Chairman of the Special Committee established by the General Assembly to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories. I wish to convey to the Palestinian people, on behalf of the Special Committee, assurances of our sincere solidarity in the struggle to exercise their inalienable rights.

The land of Palestine is still under harsh military occupation — the longest occupation recorded in modern times, violating relevant provisions of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The suspension by major donors of their financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority, combined with Israel's halting of the transfer of custom taxes and revenues collected, has triggered a major and unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories, leading to an increase in violations of several basic human rights.

Violence and human rights violations have reached unprecedented levels over the past six months in the Gaza Strip, with killings taking the lives of many innocent civilians, including women and children, and with the demolition of a large number of homes and

properties and of public infrastructure. The destruction of the only power station in Gaza, which caused major electricity cuts and water restrictions for the population, an alarmingly expanding poverty rate and a severe deterioration of the health system have all contributed to a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

The human rights situation is no better in the West Bank, as the territorial contiguity of the land is being increasingly challenged by the ongoing construction of the separation wall, which increasingly isolates Palestinian communities from one another. That situation is seriously compounded by the growth of Jewish settlements on confiscated land. It now takes an inordinately long time for Palestinians to reach school, work, health or social facilities. Many hours are spent driving through road closures or road blocks and waiting at gates — which are subject to erratic opening hours — to cross through the wall. Ambulances transporting sick patients, the elderly and pregnant women must also wait long hours before being allowed to cross through checkpoints and reach the nearest hospital or to release the patients to another ambulance. Several deaths and births at checkpoints have been reported.

The human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remains as bad as reported in previous years. Split families continue to be separated. Only students in Damascus are allowed to visit their families once a year during the period of study. The Judaization of Arabic culture and school curriculums goes unabated in the Syrian Golan. The population suffers from discrimination in job opportunities and from a deteriorating environment endangered by landmines.

During its annual visit to Egypt, Jordan and Syria, which took place this year from 11 to 22 November, the Special Committee had ample opportunity to see for itself and to record the testimonies of Palestinian and Arab witnesses. Although the visit had been initially scheduled in August, the situation in the region at that time compelled the Special Committee to reluctantly postpone its field visit to November. Nevertheless, the Committee submitted its report to the sixty-first session of the General Assembly in early November and will submit an updated report on the field visit in early 2007.

The Special Committee is convinced that the impunity enjoyed by Israel for decades must now be brought to an end by all legal means available. The time has come for the Palestinians to be empowered to request compensation for the deaths of their loved ones and for the damages caused to property and infrastructure. The Special Committee is also of the view that the Palestinian Authority has a particular responsibility to ensure, by all means at its disposal, that the rule of law is restored in the territories under its jurisdiction.

The Special Committee cannot conceal the fact that during its field visit, anger was at times expressed at the apparent inaction of the international community, including the United Nations, and that a number of Palestinians felt they had been neglected, if not abandoned, by the international community. There is no doubt that new peace initiatives to improve the dire humanitarian situation of Palestinians are urgently needed to reverse the consequences of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories. In that regard, the Special Committee welcomes the ceasefire agreed in Gaza and sincerely hopes that that initiative will engender further action to establish sustainable peace in all the occupied territories and to protect the human rights of Palestinians and other Arabs in those territories.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mrs. Ileana Bárbara Núñez Mordoche, Deputy Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mrs. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to read out the following message from His Excellency Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, on behalf of the presidency of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the people of Cuba:

> "On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour to convey, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the people of Cuba, warmest greetings to our Palestinian brothers and sisters, and to reiterate to them once again our profound solidarity and support.
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> "At the recently concluded Fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held at Havana, the heads of State or Government in attendance reviewed the continuing grave

situation in the Palestinian occupied territory, including East Jerusalem. They expressed their deep regret that the Palestinian people continue to suffer under the prolonged and brutal Israeli military occupation of their land since 1967 and continue to be denied their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their lands and the right to full enjoyment of their own sovereign and independent State.

"Nearly 60 years have passed since the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of its resolution 181 (II), which provided for the partition of Palestine and the creation of two independent States, which should coexist in peace and harmony. However, the just aspiration of the Palestinian people to create its own State has yet to be fulfilled.

"The Fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement adopted an important Declaration on Palestine, in which member countries expressed their grave concern about the serious deterioration of the situation on the ground at the political, economic, social and humanitarian levels in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Similarly, they firmly condemned Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands and the ceaseless Israeli aggression, which has resulted in, inter alia, the continued killing and injury of Palestinian civilians by the excessive and indiscriminate use of force, targeted attacks and extrajudicial executions; the vast destruction of properties, infrastructure and agricultural lands; and the detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians.

"Israel, the occupying Power, continues to disregard international law and to fail, systematically and with impunity, to comply with more than 100 resolutions of various United Nations organs, including more than 60 adopted by the Security Council.

"In the aforementioned Declaration of the Fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, the heads of State or Government reiterated their condemnation of Israel for the deepening crisis and isolation in the Gaza Strip following the implementation of its unilateral disengagement plan. They also condemned Israel for its continued construction of the wall through occupied Palestinian territory, in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004.

"I wish to reaffirm the steadfast commitment expressed by the Non-Aligned Movement to continue to support the Palestinian people and their leadership to put an end to the Israeli occupation, in accordance with the norms and principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, and to urgently provide economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate the current financial and humanitarian crisis that they are enduring. To that end, the support of the international community is essential.

"I also reaffirm Cuba's aspiration to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for all peoples of the Middle East, without exclusion, one that secures for the Palestinian people their right to self-determination and sovereignty in their own independent State, with the borders previous to 4 June 1967 as the basis, and with East Jerusalem as its capital. In their pursuit of peace, the Arab peoples will always be able to count on the full support of the Movement.

"I should like to conclude by expressing our most sincere hope that, one day in the not-too-distant future, Palestine can become another sovereign State in this community of nations."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I ask the representative of Cuba to kindly convey to the Cuban authorities and to the Minister for Foreign Affairs the sincere thanks of the Committee for that important message.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Agshin Mehdiyev, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, who will read out a statement by His Excellency Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, in his capacity as Chairman of the Thirty-Third Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Mehdiyev (Azerbaijan): I am pleased to read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the

Republic of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Thirty-Third Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

"The cause of Palestine, as well as the situation in the Middle East at large, continues to be a central element of United Nations activities and remains a source of great concern for us. The economic and financial constraints imposed on the work of the Palestinian Government are counterproductive to the objective of bringing a just peace to that sacred land as soon as possible. Azerbaijan strongly condemns the Israeli military attacks against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank.

"We are faced with a war against our Palestinian brothers and sisters. We are profoundly concerned by the alarming escalation of hostilities, which threatens to cause massive destruction and bloodshed in the Palestinian areas. International humanitarian values and international law are being violated. We believe that the United Nations Security Council, proclaimed custodian of international peace and security, could be more effective and active in bringing an end to the ongoing human tragedy.

"The situation developing in the region can be described as a catastrophe, and the current military activities are damaging the lives of our brothers and sisters. International law — namely, the Fourth Geneva Convention — calls for urgent international action to stop the losses of human life and the destruction of the environment.

"Azerbaijan, both in its capacity as Chair of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and as a responsible member of the international community, supports the efforts by the Quartet and encourages all parties to return to implementation of the Road Map. My country hopes that resolution of the problems of the region will pave the way for the early establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State, living side by side with its neighbours."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I ask the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to convey to His Excellency Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Thirty-Third Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pascal Gayama, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Congo to the United Nations, who will read out a message addressed to the Committee from His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, in his capacity as Chairperson of the African Union.

Mr. Gayama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the signal honour to address to the Assembly, on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo and current Chairperson of the African Union, the following message.

"It gives me particular pleasure, on this day of commemoration, to express Africa's great solidarity with the Palestinian people, particularly because this event is taking place at a critical time in the struggle of those proud and worthy people to exercise their national rights.

"The universal conscience is appalled at the injust fate too long imposed on the Palestinian people, victims of an occupation whose brutality contradicts the principles and norms of international law.

"It is a matter of urgency to put an end to all acts of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the indiscriminate, disproportionate and excessive use of force, as well as to irresponsible acts of provocation.

"This repeated violence can only take us further away from peace and cause tragic events such as the massacre of civilians that took place at Beit Hanoun, in the Gaza Strip, on 8 November 2006. We call on all parties to the conflict — both political leaders and those who are engaged in armed combat — to exercise restraint and responsibility.

"Only the end of the occupation will lead to the full enjoyment by the Palestinian people of their inalienable national rights, in particular the right to a State worthy of that name.

"The international community has a responsibility to assist the Palestinian people in

their quest for sovereignty, national independence and the recovery of the territorial integrity of Palestine.

"For some days now, the ceasefire concluded between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has enabled one to foresee — for the first time in a very long time — real possibilities for action between the two parties and with the involvement of the international community. This positive atmosphere should be welcomed and given every chance to become a truly irreversible process.

"In this respect, the peace process must be urgently relaunched to bring it out of the state of dormancy in which it has languished for too long. We support the idea of holding an international conference to breathe new life into the peace process through agreed initiatives and mechanisms pursuant to relevant United Nations resolutions.

"The Road Map must be implemented, and the role of the Quartet for the Middle East is of crucial importance in this respect.

"In view of the symbolic content of the question of Palestine, its resolution is vital, since to a large extent peace and security in the region and throughout the world depend on it.

"The question of Palestine is basically a political question, and a political solution must be found to it. But the serious humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people also merits our utmost attention.

"Like every other people in the world, the Palestinian people deserve every opportunity to emerge from the extremely precarious situation in which they are confined — a situation that, unfortunately, is of no concern to those who support the indefensible status quo.

"In order to mitigate the serious humanitarian, social and economic crisis affecting Palestine, we call upon Israel to put an end to the closure of the occupied territories in conformity with the provisions of the Agreement on Movement and Access. Likewise, Israel must restore Palestinian assets generated by customs duties and taxes. The international community, in particular the major donors, must resume the provision of financial aid and emergency humanitarian assistance to Palestine.

"In conclusion, we reaffirm our conviction that only a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East crisis can bring peace and security to this extremely troubled region. Such a settlement will depend upon the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel and peace and security."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the Congo for that important message from His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo and current Chairman of the African Union. I request him to kindly convey to President Sassou Nguesso the sincere thanks of the Committee for that important message.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like first of all to convey to you, Sir, and to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, salutations from Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. I would like to express his profound appreciation for the positive role played by the Committee in the defence of the Palestinian people and their legitimate national rights, in particular their right to self-determination and the creation of an independent State on their national territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to United Nations resolutions and other relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

I would like now to read out Secretary-General Amre Moussa's message.

"The commemoration today of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people is taking place against the backdrop of an unprecedented deterioration of the political, security, economic and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. Indeed, Israel, the occupying Power, is continuing to carry out acts of aggression against the Palestinian people in flagrant violation of the international

humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"The most recent of those aggressions — what Israel called the "Autumn Clouds" operation and the brutal crime which it perpetrated against Palestinian civilians in Beit Hanoun — elicited anger, denunciation and condemnation from various States and regional and international organizations. Such Israeli aggressions and violations in the past few months have caused hundreds of deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians, most of them women and children. In addition, Palestinian infrastructure has been systematically destroyed; a blockade has been imposed; crossing points have been closed; and collective sanctions have been imposed against Palestinian towns and villages. This has transformed the occupied Palestinian territories into a large prison guarded by the Israeli military machine.

"The Palestinian people have been denied their basic right to live in dignity, stability and security. During that period, Israel has kidnapped and detained a large number of Palestinian officials and members of Cabinet and the Legislative Council in order to paralyse the democratically elected Palestinian Government, which intensified the cycle of violence and destroyed the hope of resolving the question of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees held in Israeli jails.

"Despite the Arab funds that were set up to help the Palestinian people deal with the blockade and its impact, and despite the positive impact — no matter how limited it was — of the temporary mechanism established by the European Union to alleviate the suffering of people in the occupied Palestinian territories, the situation has been exacerbated by the economic blockade imposed on the Palestinian National Authority, and Israel's refusal to transfer tax revenues to it. That means that more than 160,000 employees of the Palestinian Authority have not received their salaries for more than eight months and, as a result, that their most basic daily needs were not being met.

"This situation has aggravated the humanitarian crisis and led to a grave drop in the quality of services provided by the Palestinian National Authority, in particular in the areas of health care and education.

"Israel's persistent claim that there is no Palestinian partner in the peace process, and its attempt to impose the Israeli peace through unilateral and partial solutions, create new realities on the ground, and expand its settlement activities. That, along with the construction of the racist separation wall, has impeded all Arab as well as international efforts to relaunch the peace process, including the efforts of the Quartet. That has obliterated any hope of relaunching direct negotiations aimed at establishing a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security, which would realize the two-State vision and implement the Road Map adopted by the Quartet.

"The ever-deepening crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories is having a grave impact on the prospects for peace and security in the region. The Arab States spoke out with one voice in the Security Council on 21 September 2006 (*see S/PV.5530*) to mobilize international and regional efforts to revive the peace process under the direct auspices of the Council, as the international body responsible for maintaining peace and security in the region and for providing international moral and legal leadership in protecting the Palestinian people.

"The resolution adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States, meeting at the ministerial level in extraordinary session on 12 November 2006, expressed profound indignation at the exercise of the veto by the United States in the Security Council against the Arab draft resolution, which prevented the Council from playing its role and assuming its responsibilities in the face of Israel's aggression, which continues unabated in the Gaza Strip. It called for the convening of an international peace conference to be attended by the Arab parties, Israel and the permanent members of the Security Council in order to revive the Middle East peace process and thus arrive at a just and comprehensive solution on all tracks of the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the principle of land for peace. The League of Arab States once again emphasizes the urgency of

this issue and calls upon the international community to provide all necessary assistance to save peace and stability in the region.

"In that context, the Arab States reaffirm their commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted at the 2002 Beirut Summit. We call upon Israel to respond in a positive manner to that historic and unprecedented initiative, which seeks to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We also call upon Israel not to seek to obtain peace without withdrawing from the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied in 1967. Israel cannot maintain its security at the expense of the security of the Palestinian people. It must be aware that peace, coexistence and stability can be achieved in the region only by establishing a viable Palestinian State and finding a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

"The peace process must not be held hostage to Israel's intentions and policies. We believe it is high time that the international community, represented by the United Nations and particularly the Security Council, shoulder its direct responsibility for reviving and guiding the peace process, in order to achieve peace and stability for all peoples and countries in the Middle East."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I ask the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to kindly convey to His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Joshua Ruebner, Coordinator of the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, who will make a statement on behalf of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine, an international network of civil society organizations supporting the work of the Committee.

Mr. Ruebner (United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation): I would like to express my appreciation to the General Assembly's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for sponsoring this solemn meeting on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is a tribute to the long-standing commitment of the Committee — especially its Chairman, Ambassador Paul Badji, as well as of Ambassador Riyad Mansour and the rest of the Committee's leadership — that the Assembly continues to link its work with civil society partners to remind the international community of the catastrophic situation facing Palestinians and of the urgent need to end Israel's occupation and to provide Palestinians with all the rights guaranteed to them under international law and United Nations resolutions.

I am honoured that the Committee selected me to deliver this year's message from the International Coordinating Network on Palestine and from international civil society as a whole. I work with the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, a national coalition of more than 200 organizations working to change United States policy towards Israel/Palestine to support a just peace based on human rights and international law, rather than on military occupation. I am also a member of the Steering Committee of United for Peace and Justice, the country's largest peace coalition, composed of more than 1,400 organizations, which also shares that goal.

Although all components of global civil society have an important role to play in working for the realization of Palestinian human rights, United States civil society has an especially integral role. That is because the United States provides Israel with the uncritical military, economic, diplomatic and corporate support that enables it to violate with impunity international law and Palestinian human rights on a massive scale. Therefore, people in the United States who believe in peace and justice have an obligation to change those policies if we ever hope to make progress towards the realization of Palestinian human rights.

However, neither United States civil society nor the Palestinian people can afford to wait until the United States Government changes its policies of its own volition; United States civil society must force such changes upon our Government. That is why the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation has adopted the July 2005 call from Palestinian civil society for campaigns of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel until it ends its occupation of all Palestinian territory, grants full equality to Palestinian citizens of Israel and honours the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

That is why we are reframing our work in an anti-apartheid context, working to oppose what General Assembly resolution 3068 (XXIII) defines as the international crime of apartheid — an apt description of Israel's policies towards Palestinians, whether they live under military occupation as unequal citizens of Israel or as refugees. That is why we are heeding the call from Palestinian civil society and from the International Coordinating Network on Palestine for a global day of action to mark the fortieth anniversary of Israel's illegal military occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Under the banner "The World Says No to Israeli Occupation", we are organizing what we anticipate will be the largest-ever protest in the United States in favour of Palestinian human rights, in Washington, D.C., during the weekend of 9 June 2007.

We believe that this work is urgent, because the United States is stymieing effective action by the international community in general and the United Nations in particular towards a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis and the realization of Palestinian human rights. The most recent example of United States obstructionism at the United Nations occurred on 11 November 2006, when the United States vetoed an already-weakened Security Council draft resolution calling for the establishment of a fact-finding mission to investigate Israel's 8 November 2006 artillery barrage of a home in Beit Hanoun, which killed 19 civilians, including many children.

Despite the fact that the resolution called upon the Palestinian Authority to work to halt the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, described the draft resolution as "biased against Israel and politically motivated" (*S/PV.5565, p. 2*). United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated, "We do not believe the resolution was designed to contribute to the cause of peace", even though an initial draft of the text called for United Nations observers on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip and the final draft called for the possible establishment of an international mechanism for the protection of the civilian populations.

Since the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada against Israeli military occupation, the United States has vetoed nine Security Council draft resolutions dealing with Israel/Palestine — draft resolutions which called for United Nations observers to be sent to the occupied Palestinian territories; for Israel to end construction of its apartheid wall in the West Bank, which was declared to be illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004; and for related actions. This consistent obstructionism by the United States provides Israel with impunity for its actions in violation of international law and human rights standards.

Because the Security Council is prevented from taking any effective action towards a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis due to the consistent vetoes of the United States, it is imperative that the more democratic General Assembly take up this matter so as to break the Security Council deadlock, including through use of the Uniting for Peace precedent. Only the General Assembly can move forward on the basis of that precedent and take steps to put an international peacekeeping force in the occupied Palestinian territories; compel Israel to fulfil its requirements under United Nations resolutions that have already been adopted; and convene a truly international peace conference to establish a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

If the General Assembly were to do that, it would find much support for its actions among global civil society in general and, in particular, among the growing segment of United States civil society that is increasingly alarmed by our country's uncritical support for Israel's violations of Palestinians' human rights.

Again, I thank the Committee for having given me this opportunity to represent international civil society today in commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Ruebner for his important statement. I noted that those present in the Chamber listened to him very carefully. Only representatives of non-governmental and civil society organizations can speak as he did, and we welcome his comments. I would also like, through him, to thank the many civil society organizations throughout the world that are working actively to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. We thank them for their valuable contribution to the work of the Committee.

I am happy to announce that the Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, ministers for foreign

affairs and international organizations. I should like to remind the Committee that the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat. I should like to read out the list of names of those who have sent messages.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: His Excellency Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of Afghanistan; His Excellency Mr. Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt; His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Mr. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of the Federal Republic of Brazil; His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, President of Turkey; His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Minh Triet, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Algerian Democratic and People's Republic; His Excellency Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of the Republic of Indonesia; His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia; His Excellency Mr. Kim Yong Nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; His Excellency Mr. Choummaly Sayasone, President of Lao People's Democratic Republic; His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar; His Excellency Mr. Omer Hassan A. Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan; His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates and sovereign of Abu Dhabi; His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka; His Excellency Mr. Vicente Fox Quesada, President of Mexico; His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco; His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain; His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah of Brunei Darussalam; Her Excellency Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria of the Republic of Chile; His Excellency Mr. Iajuddin Ahmed, President and Principal Counsellor of the Interim Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal; His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives; His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation.

We have received messages from the following heads of Government: His Excellency Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Mr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India; His Excellency General Surayud Chulanont, Prime Minister of Thailand; His Excellency Mr. Ousmane Issoufi Maiga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mali; His Excellency Mr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius; and His Excellency Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; His Excellency Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan; His Excellency Mr. Borys Tarasyuk, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalghem, Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

We have also received messages from His Excellency Mr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and from the European Union.

Those are the messages that the Committee has already received. Of course, messages will continue to arrive. As I said, those that we receive will be transcribed in a special bulletin to be issued by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

On behalf of the Committee, I should like to express our sincere thanks to the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and international organizations that I have just mentioned, as well as to all participants in this meeting, for their tireless efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and for their constant support for the Committee in carrying out its mandate.

The statements that we have heard today and the messages of solidarity that we have received demonstrate once again the international community's unwavering support for the establishment of peace in the Middle East and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, on the basis of the

relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure all participants that the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort in pursuing those objectives.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization): I have the pleasure to begin my short statement by expressing to you, Mr. Chairman, my gratitude for your continuous and unflagging efforts to serve the cause of Palestine and the struggle of our people to attain their inalienable right to return to their homes and properties and to establish an independent State of their own. I also wish to thank His Excellency Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam for his report on Israeli practices affecting human rights in the occupied territories.

At the same time, I wish to express my gratitude to all the heads of State, Ministers for Foreign Affairs and members of international organizations who have shown their support for our people. Once again, I express my thanks to all the friends of Palestine who have participated in this event, either by attending in person or by sending a letter of solidarity. I thank all of them for their participation and for their support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover their lost rights. I hope to see them in Palestine soon — next year.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I should like to express to Mr. Kaddoumi the Committee's thanks for his faithful presence at the commemorations held in the past few years. He has been the most faithful of the faithful, and we are immensely grateful to him for that.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I wish to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of this event. I should like to mention in particular the personnel of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department of Public Information and the Office of Central Support Services and all those who work quietly and effectively behind the scenes.

I wish to remind participants that a Palestinian art exhibit, organized by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, will open at 6 p.m. today in the visitors' lobby of the General Assembly building. This year's exhibit is entitled "Contextualization: a Palestinian Narrative". The opening will be followed by a reception, to which everyone is cordially invited.

Following this meeting, at 1 p.m. in the auditorium of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, everyone is invited to attend the screening of a film entitled *The Colour of Olives*.

I thank everyone very much for their presence and their participation.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.